



FACT SHEET

Module 12

Urban Driving

Montana is the nation's fourth largest state yet it does not suffer the congestion experienced in large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles where almost 10 million people live. Montana is a rural state with a population of about 927,000 people. Billings is Montana's largest city with a population of about 135,000.

Congestion in urban areas creates clogged expressways, impossible parking, endless red lights, never-ending construction and the constant threat of car theft. It can change the most mild-manner driver into a maniac. The number of vehicles on the roadways today has grown dramatically in the past 30 years, but the number of new roads has increased only slightly.

When driving in urban areas, drivers unaccustomed to heavy congestion can reduce risk by using good driving habits. The more routine driving experience a person has, the more likely a driver will respond with the best vision, motion, and steering control.

- When approaching intersections, search deep to the left-front-right.
- Identify a safe gap when joining with traffic or passing through an intersection.
- Signal intentions early to give other drivers time to adjust to changing conditions.
- Ensure the intersection can be cleared before entering and before the traffic light turns to red.
- When the traffic light turns green, take two seconds to search left-front-right to ensure someone is not running a red light.
- Choose to drive within one lane until a turn is required; weaving in and out of traffic increases risk.
- Avoid lanes next to parked cars to improve line of sight and reduce the risk of a collision with a parking driver, bicyclist or pedestrian.
- Search for pedestrians and bicyclists that could enter the street but be momentarily hidden.
- Watch for distracted pedestrians carrying packages, talking on a cell phone, talking with other pedestrians.



Use an orderly search process

- Search front zones at least one to two blocks ahead for changing zone conditions.
- Check rear zone when you see a change to your front and side zones.
- Watch for pedestrians and bicyclists, especially when they are not watching for drivers.
- Check all blind areas before changing lane position.
- Search intersections and driveways.
- Watch for changing traffic light conditions and time arrival into a green light when possible.
- Search for traffic signs hidden by bushes and trees.
- Evaluate the four-six second area before entering that area.
- Search for vehicles parked along the street that can create large line-of-sight and path-of-travel restrictions.



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Control space to the front:

- Cover the brake when traffic and conditions become less predictable.
- Use a staggered stop to give larger vehicles more room to turn.
- Adjust lane position when there is a path-of-travel restriction.
- Strive to maintain a minimum three-second following distance.
- Be prepared to reduce speed and move into a different lane position to improve traffic and visibility conditions.
- Stop behind vehicles by using the “see tires on the pavement” rule.
- When the traffic light turns green, delay two seconds to search the left, front, and right zones before moving into the intersection.
- Determine the point of no return when two seconds from the intersection.
- Yield to oncoming drivers if there are parked cars in their lane that leaves only room for one vehicle to pass.
- Stay out of other drivers’ blind areas.
- Reduce speed and covering the brake when pedestrians and bicyclists are seen.
- Use the lane position that gives the best line of sight and path of travel.
- Use a staggered or safety stop when streets are narrow.
- Use reference points to know where your tires are tracking.

Communicate to others

- Signal — Montana law requires a signal at least 100 feet before turning.
- Flash brake light when slowing or stopping.
- Tap the horn lightly, increase eye contact efforts.
- Use lane position to communicate intention.
- Use good communication with other drivers to help prevent conflicts.

Make reduced-risk decisions

- Stay within the posted speed limit and choose to reduce speed to reduce risk.
- Know your “perception” time (the amount of time it takes to see a hazard) and “reaction time” (the time it takes to act after seeing the hazard).
- Know how to access local traffic information to plan alternative routes.
- Plan routes that avoid rush hour and work zone congestion.
- Avoid frequent lane changes — it greatly increases the chance of a collision.
- Make smooth, controlled steering and braking maneuvers.
- Cover the brake when conditions become unstable.
- Always wear a seat belt.
- Stay cool, calm and collected to arrive safely at your destination, even when drivers cut you off and pedestrians jaywalk.